

What Great Emails Do So Well...and Why

By Regina Brady (published in Catalog Success Magazine, October 2008)

This month, I thought I'd share some of my favorite e-mails and explain why they're tops in my book. As you read them, think about how you might incorporate these tactics in your own e-mail programs.

Orvis and Customer Reviews

Many catalogers include customer product reviews on their sites. It's a great way to take advantage of Web 2.0 by integrating customer content online. Plus, shoppers place a high value on reviews in the shopping process — this user-generated content should increase sales.

If you have customer reviews on your site make sure the members of your email list are aware of this feature. Orvis called attention to their reviews in this recent email. The subject line is: "Rave reviews! See our latest 5-star customer favorites."



Another thing I liked about this email is that it uses a variation of top 10 lists. Shoppers love to know the most popular items on a site. The copy under the main headline calls attention to the latest top eight most popular items.

Sephora and the Subtle Sell

As a consumer, I enjoy the variety of emails I receive from cosmetics company Sephora. The twice-weekly emails employ a mix of hard-hitting product promotion and value-added content.

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The subject line for this email is: "Makeup artist must-haves. Their #1 faves!" This is a strong subject line — everyone wants to know what the experts use. And, it used a number in the subject line. Numbers fascinate readers and capture attention. Plus, they're likely to increase open rates.

The main offer position features six tricks followed by a secondary panel with three additional tricks. Products are nicely displayed and the minimal copy works well.

The bottom of the email (not shown) also ties the marketing message together. A special event at a Sephora store near me is featured. The copy included: "Score a beautiful new look from one of The Sephora Pro Beauty Team's most talented and knowledgeable makeup artists. Sign up for a complimentary color consultation, get your beauty questions answered and experience beauty one-on-one."



1-800-Flowers and a Simple Thank You

I'd bought a gift and received this elegant acknowledgement. It was personalized to me and signed by the company's president, Chris McCann.

The subject line is: "Thank you for shopping with us!"

The email included a promotional code to save 15% on my next purchase and it also promoted their gift reminder service. This email is a nice mix of customer service and marketing.



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Doctors Foster and Smith and Value-added Content

This pet supplies cataloger has 12 different email programs based on the type of pet or animal of interest. It even has "Ferret Care Today!"

I have a cat, so I signed up for the Cat Care Today e-newsletter. The subject line is: "5 Ways to Discourage Spraying" – notice the use of a number in the subject line again.

The company makes great use of the preview pane with personalization (Dear Regina) and a "snippet." A snippet is a marketing message that usually plays off the subject line and provides additional motivation to open the email. In this email the marketer packed two ideas into this area: "Here's what you can do to discourage inappropriate territorial spraying. Plus - 25% OFF Anniversary Specials!"



The company led with informational content of interest to cat owners that links to a one-page article prepared by the company's educational staff. This is a great way to build trust with readers, who will be more likely to open the next email received knowing there may be some additional tips in store for them.

At the bottom of the email they promoted a pet photo contest. This is another way to engage and involve readers.

Borders Treats Me Special

Some e-retailers collect the individual's birthday during sign-up. This is a great way to take advantage of triggered messaging to send a relevant email that is sure to be opened.

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The subject line is: "Happy Birthday from Borders" and includes a 15% off offer that can be used online or at a local store.

The design is simple and pleasing.

Despair and a Sense of Humor

Despair markets motivational (or to be more accurate, demotivational) posters, calendars and other products. I read their catalog with a magnifying glass to savor the captions they employ. And, their emails also use this same approach. Despair's irreverent sense of humor appeals to me.

The subject line is: "The Wailing List - Minds Are Like Parachutes" and the caption for the photo on Sanity says: "Minds are like Parachutes. Just because you've lost yours doesn't mean you can borrow mine."

The rest of the email goes on to present reader comments on a previous promotion for a poster that poked fun at the government. Many readers were offended and this cataloger was gutsy enough to share some of the emails they received.

Despair has fun with their email program and their website. The email program embodies the company character.

I hope you did enjoy these examples. Now, select at least two ideas and put them to work in your email programs.

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